



Reaching Out: Attorney General Visited Schools to Deter Gang Activity and Violence

Although enforcement is a crucial element in the continuing effort to keep young people from drinking underage, committing acts of violence and engaging in street gang activity, enforcement alone is not the answer.

That truism was the core philosophy behind Attorney General Harvey's series of visits to public schools throughout New Jersey in 2005. During those visits, the Attorney General met face-to-face with thousands of students of all ages, and engaged in frank discussions with them about the choices they face, and the potential impact of those choices. Among schools visited were: East Orange Campus High School, Newark Eastside High School, Cliffside Park High School, Teaneck High School and West Orange High School.

Discussing Ramifications of the "Thug Life" With Middle School Students

In April 2005, Attorney General Harvey visited the East Orange School District and met

with hundreds of middle school students in grades six, seven and eight. The central focus of the discussion was the manner in which images popularized in music, videos and clothing have helped to mythologize violent behavior and glorify the "thug" lifestyle.

Joining Attorney General Harvey was Dr. Duane Dyson, Chairman of the Violence Prevention Institute, a non-profit organization that sponsored the event as part of an ongoing, statewide campaign to educate young people about the real-life consequences of violence.

"Outreach to our schools — including candid give-and-take sessions like the one in East Orange — is crucial to connecting with young people and their parents, to de-glamorizing the thug life, and to reinforcing education, respect and other life-affirming values," said Attorney General Harvey, who returned to East Orange shortly after his visit with middle school students there for a similar session with East Orange High School students.

"It's true that enforcement is vital to making our neighborhoods safe and upholding the law, but enforcement is not a complete solution, and never can be," he added. "We have to establish, and sustain, a conversation with our young people that helps them recognize the worth — in their own lives and in the community — of making positive choices. We simply cannot arrest, prosecute and incarcerate every troubled young person."

Focusing H.S., College Students on Sex Assault, Domestic Violence

Consistent with his focus on violence and its effect on young lives, the Attorney General visited Bergen County Community College in Paramus, in October 2005. On that occasion, he met with approximately 300 high school and college students to discuss the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. The most recent New Jersey Uniform Crime Report data showed that, despite a reduction in crime overall statewide, there had been an increase in domestic violence and sexual assault, including among the elderly and young people. Attorney General Harvey was joined for the Bergen County event by representatives of the county government, as well as representatives of the Association of Black Women Lawyers.

While the Attorney General's Office continued throughout 2005 to engage students in conversation about the false glamour of violence and gangs, there was also a concerted effort to focus attention on other critical issues — including underage drinking, and drinking and driving (see pages 54 through 56).

Shown at left are posters displayed at NJ Transit bus stops throughout New Jersey. Both English and Spanish language posters were created by our in-house communications staff.



In Plainfield, special guest warns kids about gangs

State attorney general makes stop at Boys & Girls Clubs of Union County.

By CHAD WEISSBACH
Staff Writer

PLAINFIELD — Attorney General Peter C. Harvey visited the city Monday for the second time in a week, this time to promote an initiative that aims to build up and protect young people before they can be pulled into gang life.

sworn some of their toughest questions based on real-world experiences:

What if I find a gun lying around? How can I avoid being drawn into a gang when I could get beat up for not having friends who will protect me? Can I trust the police?

"The conversations these kids were having today — now they're thinking about the consequences of gang membership," Harvey said afterward. "It's the number-one issue in our cities — it's the number-one issue."

The program started by the attorney general's office, Project Vision, eventually will be extended to all 21 counties in the state, though it is beginning with a steady state.

